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**“The Future of DoD Public Affairs”
Dr. George Little, Assistant to the Secretary of Defense
DMA Studio 1, Ft. Meade, Maryland
Thursday, July 25, 2013**

MC3 ANTHONY ROSA: Ladies and gentlemen, please rise. It is my privilege to introduce the assistant secretary of defense of public affairs, Dr. George Little.

GEORGE LITTLE: Good Morning, everyone. Please have a seat. And thank you Petty Officer Rosa.

I am grateful to Ray Shepherd, the Defense Media Activity Director, and Colonel Jeremy Martin, Commandant of the Defense Information School, for inviting me to speak today and making this event possible. And I appreciate the time you're all taking to be here.

It's great to be back up at Fort Meade and speaking at DMA's studio one. If you're here for a classified briefing, you're on the wrong part of the base. If you're here for the course on the origins of unpopular words, you're in the wrong classroom. Not to spoil today's lesson, but the word of the day is sequestration.

This morning, I'd like to share some overarching thoughts about our public affairs community and our mission going forward. And I'd like to begin by thanking all of you in the department's public affairs community for the great work you do to make sure that the American people know what our military and civilian agencies are doing to keep our nation safe.

You are all part of a dynamic, professional public affairs community that I am proud to lead every day. Whether it's working with my team at the Pentagon or visiting PAOs at the combatant commands, I've had the opportunity to see the tremendous impact you all have on the mission of the Department of Defense.

A quick shout-out to one person who has made a tremendous impact over the course of his career. For the past 21 years, Master Sergeant Jeremy Lock has exemplified hard work, most recently serving as the chief photographer for Airman Magazine. Master Sergeant Lock, thank you for your service, and good luck in your retirement. Give him a hand.

I'd also like to recognize those in our community who have served in Iraq and Afghanistan, whether military or civilian. To all of you who have served in a war zone who have risked your lives while working with our operations in the field, we thank you for your service. As we draw down our forces in Afghanistan, we are reminded that public affairs professionals still put themselves at risk to tell the incredible story of America's wars and the people who fight them.

Today, I'd like to pause and remember one of our own, Army Specialist Hilda Clayton – a combat camera soldier assigned to Fort Meade and someone who spent a lot of time here at DINFOS. Hilda was killed recently in a training exercise in Jalalabad, Afghanistan. She was part of our community, our public affairs family, and the Fort Meade team. Our hearts go out to her, her family, her friends, and her public affairs colleagues.

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As public affairs professionals, you're part of a long and distinguished line. The relationship between the press and the military predates the republic. OSD's historians tell me that George Washington – and by the way, I'm particularly and personally grateful for the resurgence of George as a popular name – George Washington supplied a newspaper publisher with tenting cloth so that his troops would be able to read a newspaper regularly.

Washington also implored Congress to make arrangements for a small traveling press pool to follow his moves at headquarters in order to give speedy and exact information about any military transactions. This request was denied; it never happens in this town. If only the Pentagon Press Association had been established earlier, things might have been different.

What's true today, though, is that the Department of Defense is going through a once-in-a-generation change, and our community, the public affairs community, must change with it. Today, maybe more than ever, public affairs is an absolutely critical component of our military and our department. We operate in a world so tightly connected that every world event, big or small, can be felt in real time.

Thanks to the Internet and services such as Twitter and Facebook, the walls between citizens, journalists, and the military have never been thinner. In many ways, this is positive for our democracy. And as these lines continue to overlap and evolve, your relationship with your commanders and senior civilian leaders is crucial. You are not just typers of talking points, but strategic advisers, helping your leadership manage and navigate a complex media landscape and an equally complex set of issues surrounding national security.

In the context of these significant shifts, I'd like to address three key issues. First, we must reflect on how DOD public affairs has transitioned over a decade of war and tremendous shifts in the media environment. Second, we must identify the areas where public affairs can improve officers and our community can improve our tradecraft, what skills we need to perfect to better explain what our department does. And, third, we must examine the role our military and civilian leaders play in helping our mission in the public affairs community.

In the last 12 years, the way we interact with the press has changed dramatically. By embedding reporters directly within military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, PAOs and commanders were able to forge close bonds with reporters and photographers who were embedded with them. As we reshape the force globally, we must look for new ways to enhance these bonds. And we need to be mindful of the fact that following the drawdown in Afghanistan next year, and barring any unforeseen contingencies, we will be moving more toward a garrison public affairs environment.

Today, news breaks not just on television, but on websites and blogs and Twitter. Media outlets have become more and more dynamic, able to report a story in near-real time. Reporters are not just filing stories with large newspapers and trade publications; they're also reporting through blogs and Twitter.

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With the move to dedicated blogs and reporters on Twitter, there's a hunger for more news, to file small stories, and report tidbits multiple times a day. This type of reporting and this kind of demand signal lifts the curtain on the day-to-day operations at the Pentagon or within the services. This can be valuable in humanizing the complex offices we all work in, but it can also present risks, allowing gossip and rumor to take the place of long-form reporting.

These changes have consequences for public affairs professionals in the department. First, we can no longer rely on relationships with a handful of journalists. We must constantly be listening for new voices on defense issues and develop those relationships, as well. A new blogger might end up being more influential than traditional outlets, in some cases. If we aren't talking to him or her, we are missing a potential opportunity to inform the American people.

The barrier to entry in the news world is so low today that every person with a smartphone has the potential to report news. One reaction to all these changes might be to be more insular, to fear the immediate reaction that is possible in the current news environment. I believe there's a different path we must take. We must engage with anyone and everyone who is interested in what the department is doing. I believe we need more engagement, not less. We should be meeting our stakeholders wherever they are.

In order to effectively communicate our message, we must be communicating across all platforms, new and old. By creating richer, more interesting content, we can create a deeper connection with the American public and nourish the growing news appetite on our terms.

Public affairs officers have done a stellar job over the past 12 years, but in order to meet new challenges, we need to push ourselves to be better, both in our individual skills and how we work as a community. This is particularly true, given the fact that we're entering an era of constrained resources. No longer are budget constraints hypothetical. All civilians – and that includes yours truly -- have begun taking weekly furlough days to make up the budget shortfall in fiscal year 2013.

While details are still to be clarified for fiscal year '14, we must all think creatively on how best to communicate with the American people. We can learn new outreach techniques by looking at what's happening in the private and nonprofit sectors. And we must be ready to experiment with new and less expensive ways to connect with the nation.

No matter what medium we're using, we must be effective communicators. Leave the jargon and acronyms to the planners and operators at other parts of the department. We must communicate with the American public in crisp and memorable lines that deliver a clear and accurate message.

I encourage everyone who works in public affairs to truly become a student of writing and media. Those who excel in this profession are hungry for information. They're always reading articles, journals, fiction, and if they're a student of Admiral Kirby, chief of naval information, they may be reading some poetry, as well. They're even reading Duffel Blog and watching The Daily Show.

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The more you can understand the media business, not just the military media business, the better you will be at your jobs and the more successful you will be at communicating your message to the American people. Read the op-ed columns. Read the sports columns. Understand what lines connect with the reader. Understand what headline you need to grab their attention.

Intellectual curiosity provides a basis for sound work, but it must be complemented by professionalism in your craft. I've sometimes heard the public affairs professionals feel like their job is to link the press to the experts in the department. I disagree. It's important for us as public affairs professionals to gain a firm grounding in the substance.

You must all aim to be experts of your beat, whether it's the aircraft carrier you're stationed on, the FOB where you're deployed, or the issue area you're covering in my press ops office. You must know your issues inside and out. You must know more than the reporter that is asking you questions, and you must be able to communicate on equal terms with the commander you serve. You must always be willing to be the spokesperson and to shape the story yourself.

Part of the job in public affairs is to provide context, help the public understand what we are doing, why we are doing it, and how it fits into our larger strategy. I've already talked about how we can reach more Americans, but expanding our reach is meaningless if we're not explaining our issues in a clear way and in terms the public can understand. It's not just us. Commanders and senior civilian leaders also have a role to play as we move forward. Well-read and practiced PAOs must still operate in the larger DOD community, and PAOs need the institutional support of their military service.

For years now, we have pushed the services to cultivate first-rate PAOs, and we have many of them. While there's been progress to improve the training of our public affairs officers, I believe the services must do more. In particular, they must see public affairs as a place for their best and brightest. They must provide the tools to turn young PAOs into strategists who understand all facets of public affairs. There needs to be more opportunity for PAOs that they progress in their careers, upward mobility, and incentives for talented officers. We are losing too many talented (O-5s ?) because they see no path to long-term senior advancement.

This is a problem that we will all need to grapple with, and I hope that the services will agree with me, for the services have a proud heritage of excellence in their public affairs offices. The Army public affairs office was founded by none other than Douglas MacArthur, then a major in the United States Army. And not to be outdone, the Air Force public affairs office can count at least one commander-in-chief as their own. After a stint in the cavalry, Ronald Reagan worked in the U.S. Army Air Force's first motion picture unit.

Looking to the broader military community, all leaders must understand the role of the press and the importance of working with the media. And we cannot hide our bad news stories. Bad news gets out one way or the other, and we must come to terms with telling the bad stories, as well as the good. When bad things happen, the American people should hear it from us, not as a scoop on The Drudge Report. Unlike many fine red wines, bad news does not get better with age.

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This requires commanders to change how they view their relationship with the press, in some cases. All commanders need to be open and honest with the press. Great military leaders of the past have echoed this sentiment. At the end of World War I, General Pershing wrote, and I quote, "The national defense is the ultimate mission of the Army, and a proper presentation to the public is one of the important duties of the officers of the Army."

In World War II, as general of the Army, Eisenhower knew this and ordered his subordinate commanders to be open to the news media, insisting that reporters, quote, "should be allowed to talk freely with officers and enlisted personnel and to see the machinery of war and operation in order to visualize and transmit the conditions under which the men are waging war."

Commanders must work with reporters and understand that their reporting has a real effect on the public's opinion of the military. Public affairs professionals, especially in periods of turbulence like we're facing right now, plays a critical role in educating our senior leaders to create and execute a communications strategy. PAOs must be that conduit between commanders and the media. They must likewise be unafraid to speak truth to power.

When I'm out talking to troops and public affairs professionals, I always say our PAOs need to be senior advisers first and public affairs officers second. They need to be a trusted member of their commander's inner circle, providing counsel for regular public engagement and engagement during specific moments of crisis. This also goes for PAOs who support civilian leaders in our department.

Senior military officials and senior civilian leaders must engage with all outlets in a strategic and balanced approach. To execute this successfully, leaders must rely on their PAOs' strategic advice.

I talked a lot today about PAOs being strategic advisers or giving strategic advice, so naturally some of you may be wondering about the role strategic communications plays in our public affairs operation. Up until recently, my office had an office of strategic communications. Despite closing this office, I believe strategic communications as a function is vital to our success, but it should not be a separate vein of public affairs.

Strategic communications is a skill that we should all possess. Each commander or civilian leader will have his or her own vision, and it is your job to communicate that vision to the media and the broader public. Strategic communications also means that we are all aware of how our efforts work together with other public affairs professionals in the building and that we are playing a part in the larger outreach strategy of the department, not just responding to the query of the day. Strategic communications, in many respects, is about long-term public affairs planning.

In my office, I work closely with my community relations team who works every day to develop ties in every community the military is located, which is pretty much everywhere in this country, and in many places around the world. They are a key component of how I think about public affairs. Their work with veterans service organizations and military service organizations helps us build a stronger message when talking about veterans issues. We produce the veteran, after all, in this department.

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No matter what the issue -- veterans or the budget, personnel or weapons systems -- we must engage the public through all channels. We must be engaged not only with the press, but also with community leaders and stakeholders to deliver our message in as many ways as possible.

Our jobs are not easy. Anyone who thinks public affairs is easy needs to think twice. I think you all know that. And I would say that our job is going to be more difficult as we enter a new era for our armed forces. As the department grapples with changes in funding and priorities, the public affairs community has a duty to provide the public with clear, accurate and timely information. We are going to have to be a steady hand at the helm through some rough waters.

I'm confident that we can rise to meet this challenge. With the support of military and civilian leadership, I know that we can play a critical role in delivering the department's message to the American people. That, after all, is our mission.

I'm asking all of you here today and all of you on your bases around the world to remember that you are the link between the department and the outside world. It's a two-way street. You must clearly articulate how the department and your specific services plan to act, but you must also listen to the American people, and you must engage them. You all have been given a unique and special responsibility within the department, and we have a moral obligation to the American people to explain the department's intentions and to share the nation's thoughts and ideas with those we serve.

As I close my remarks, I am reminded of Marine Corps Major Megan McClung, who was killed in December 2006 while escorting press in Al-Anbar province. In the final month of her tour in Iraq, Megan's Humvee was destroyed by an IED as she was escorting reporters into downtown Ramadi. Megan was a true professional, often going out of her way to help those around her.

After her death, Megan's mother received e-mail after e-mail from strangers who told her of the ways, both big and small, that Megan had helped them. Her parents knew she was a skilled officer, but they never knew how many lives she touched until after her death.

Let Megan's legacy be an example of what we strive for each and every day. Let us remember the power that we have to communicate with the American people and people around the world. As we emerge from more than a decade of war, Secretary Hagel has rightfully called this a defining time for our country. This community has a critical role to play in shaping our military's future. We, as public affairs officers, must explain the role our military plays in the world, and we must be as open and honest as possible in explaining the actions of our troops abroad.

While the stakes are high, I am confident that the entire Department of Defense public affairs team can meet these challenges head on. Thank you.

Thank you again for being here today, and I'd be delighted to take some questions. I'd be delighted to take some advice....Feedback.

Please. We'll start with the Associated Press.

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Q: Dr. Little, how are you doing? Colonel Johnson over at U.S. Cyber Command.

MR. LITTLE: Colonel.

Q: And, by the way, we are, in fact, working on Thom Shanker's interview.

MR. LITTLE: Okay, great, thank you.

Q: We get a lot of feedback over there, because I'm on the Title 10 side of U.S. Cyber Command and NSA Title 50. So what's your advice for -- how do we continue to get out in front of this? Or is there a plan, because we're also -- the White House is involved, you all are involved? So what's the way-ahead strategy? We're getting a lot of, you know, input from a lot of folks, but just from the horse's mouth.

MR. LITTLE: Sure. Well, thank you very much, and appreciate all that you do up at Cyber Command. Yes, NSA has been in the news lately. You mentioned Title 10 and Title 50. I've walked down both roads, having been CIA spokesman for a number of years and now being in the Title 10 world.

I think that my experience at CIA is most instructive, at least, in how I'm thinking about the challenges facing the intelligence community and our -- NSA and Cyber Command in particular. There are obvious lines that we can't cross in conveying classified information; that goes without saying. But there's a way to talk about the mission and the programs that are created that are deemed lawful by the executive branch and by the Congress and how they support the American people.

And I think that without getting into sources and methods, without getting into the classified information, there's a way to make clear and concise points about the mission of NSA and of CYBERCOM. General Alexander I think has done a very effective job in recent media interviews, and I think the more the NSA can talk about what it does and how it contributes to the nation's security, I think that'll be helpful in informing the American people, and we'll get through this rough patch.

Make no mistake about it. Recent events are deeply troubling on many levels. The unauthorized disclosure of classified information is, well, against the law and is wrong. But there's, I think, going to be light at the end of this tunnel, but it won't be easy, and there will be some chop along the way. But as long as we're straightforward and accurate with the press, I think that's the way we have to deal with the situation.

Q: Thank you. Thank you, sir. Appreciate it.

MR. LITTLE: You bet. While we're waiting for the next question to come, you know, Churchill -- I think it was Churchill -- you can fact-check me on this -- (inaudible) -- in crisis communications, I always reflect on this quote. He used to say, "If you're going to go through hell, just keep on going." And I think that's the posture that we have to take. In crisis communications

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in particular, if you're the one at the table as a public affairs officer who's all jittery and nervous, that's not good. You've got to be the one who's saying we can manage this, this is how we do it, and we'll get across this rough patch. Thank you.

Q: Good morning, sir. In your earlier comments, you talked about the need to engage with the wide range of media that are out there. And I agree with you there. However, over the course of my career, I've oftentimes had to try and figure out, what is the most beneficial return on investment, if you will, type of engagement?

So I would appreciate your thoughts on -- when you're dealing with news media, how do you determine what's going to provide the best return in terms of my engagement? Because I can't engage with every single one of them.

MR. LITTLE: Right. Well, I think that's true. I think we all have to prioritize our tasks throughout the day, and we all have to prioritize what we're looking at in terms of press stories coming down the pike.

You know, in this business, as in others, one of the critical skill sets that separates success from failure is good judgment. And good judgment, I think, is how you navigate your way through the day, especially if you're a media relations officer, dealing with the New York Times, the Washington Post, or the L.A. Times at the same time you're dealing with -- pick your blog post out there.

And what determines it for me is timing of the story, if I know it, and also the serious nature of the story that's coming down the pike and the serious nature of the query. If a blogger comes in with something that's potentially problematic, and could result in a major media crisis, then I'm going to tackle that one first, because I know that traditional media outlets look to the blogs just as we do.

I can remember an uncomfortable moment, and I won't say exactly who, but a few years ago, a blog reported that a very senior official in our government was about to resign, for this, that or the other reason. And that quickly went viral, and it just happened to be that I was having lunch that day with this senior official. And I said, this is an uncomfortable way to start a lunch conversation, but do you plan on pulling pitch? And, of course, it was untrue, but it had gone viral, so that's just one example of how we have to pay attention to what some people term non-traditional media outlets. So we can't just think about media in the way we did 5, 10 years ago, new media landscape.

Hopefully that helps to some extent.

Q: Yes, sir. Thank you for the perspective.

MR. LITTLE: You bet. One or two more?

Q: Hello.

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MR. LITTLE: How are you?

Q: It's my first time up here. I'm Staff Sergeant Hostetler. I work for Air Force production.

MR. LITTLE: Great.

Q: My question is, you mentioned that we need to start telling the story about the bad news, as well as the good. And the issue that I see that we're facing -- I just got back from Afghanistan, and the issues that we faced before, you know, the -- the big incident that I can think of before I left was when the Air Force pilots talked about the apostate that they were experiencing. It seems like we have this culture in our career to kind of glaze over these issues and put out this positive press on, "No, our jets are fine," and so with the good and the bad, I don't think the American people actually trust us to deliver accurate information.

How are we -- what's the plan to change that in the way ahead? Because to continue the way we have, to continue to put that positive spin, it feels like we're losing a lot of our audience, because they're not listening, because we keep saying the same thing over, everything is okay, and it's not, like -- or with the sexual assault issues that we've been experiencing in the Air Force. So how do we change that culture from that PAO up? Because a lot of times, the -- speaking from my perspective -- and I can only speak from my perspective -- a junior enlisted perspective, the youngest generations get it, that we have to start being honest and forthright, and it's difficult to convey those ideas and convince the chain of command to necessarily follow those or to be ready to put that first foot forward before someone else leaks our story.

Is there a plan to kind of change the way that we think? Because as it is, a lot of people -- from what I can see -- are going through with -- we're putting mindless propaganda, is what some of us feel that we're putting out, and that -- what the American public feel that we're putting out. So how do we change this?

MR. LITTLE: Thank you for a very good question, and thank you for your recent service in Afghanistan.

This is, I think, a point of tension that has long been noted in the public affairs community, what is spin versus what is a legitimate defense of your equities, whether it be an aircraft program or some other mission.

My perspective on this is that we should not think in terms of spin. I'm not a big fan of that word, and it's something I try to avoid. Do I defend the equities of this department? Absolutely. Do I defend our men and women in uniform and our civilians? Absolutely. Do I fight it out on tough stories? Yes.

But the way to get through problems such as the one you just noted, I think, is to acknowledge when we have a problem. It's going to get out. So let's be straightforward about it. Let's be accurate, and let's show a plan for how we're going to get through the problem.

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And you mentioned a very good topic and one that has attracted -- appropriately so -- a lot of media attention recently, and that's the issue of sexual assault in the military. Secretary Hagel, I think, has done a very good job of acknowledging the fact that we do have an issue inside of this department. And he's termed it a cultural issue. And we need to show that, yes, we have this problem, and here's what we're doing about it, because that's how you get yourself out of a tough spot. In your personal life, you have to acknowledge it first and then take action. And it's the same thing for public affairs professionals.

We have one of the highest ratings in terms of institutions in this country, the U.S. military does. Recent public opinion poll, I think, that -- and I think I saw some facts coming out of DMA, in fact, that -- in support of that. And in order to maintain that legitimacy and our credibility, we have to tell it to the American people as straight as we can.

And if we try to avoid the problem, delay it, if we're not upfront, then that's going to have a corrosive effect on us as individual public affairs professionals, when we're dealing with an individual reporter, but ultimately us as an institution, and I think that's problematic.

So I don't think in terms of spin. I certainly don't think in terms of propaganda, especially in the public affairs community. I think about our obligation, moral and legally, to be accurate and to -- and to tell the truth.

Q: Thank you.

MR. LITTLE: Thank you.

Q: Hello, Dr. Little. I'm a defense contractor. I manage the DOD live blog and the DOD Defense Department Facebook page. And my question for you is, have you given any thought to what you would like the Defense Department's social media presence to be? As you mentioned, bloggers are now becoming much more important in terms of their credibility within news. And how do we want to engage with that facet?

And also, as you said, kind of going off Staff Sergeant Hostetler's question, when something bad does happen, how quickly do you want the Defense Department's social media operations to engage with that and get the word out there? We traditionally usually wait for, you know, official messaging from the defense secretary, but social media is a fast-paced realm. People want to know answers or they do want an acknowledgement much quicker.

MR. LITTLE: Sure. Sure.

Q: Or they tend to kind of get the idea that -- not necessarily that there's a conspiracy, but they get angry, and then they do tend to perceive our messaging as spin. So have you given any thought to how Defense Department public affairs should engage with social media and its pace?

MR. LITTLE: Yes, I think -- A, I think we should embrace social media. And, B, even if I didn't think that, we have no choice. It's the media landscape of the 21st century. So we have to figure out how we're going to communicate through the social media channels, and not just the bad

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news, but also the good news of what we're doing. I think there are lots of good news stories that could be told through social media that we don't tell through other channels.

So now to your question about bad news on social media, yes, we have a responsibility to communicate to our own people, the 3 million-plus uniformed and civilian members of the Department of Defense, and also to the American people. Now, when it comes to bad news, sometimes we have to do this in a structured way, I think for good reason. We have to notify Congress. We have an obligation to our oversight committees. They don't like to be surprised by bad news, so we have to go through the proper channels, I think, but ultimately we have to be timely in how we communicate bad news, and I think that's the point I'm trying to get at. And social media, I think, is one vehicle to accomplish that goal. Thank you.

Q: Morning, sir.

MR. LITTLE: Morning.

Q: Second Lieutenant Justin Phillips from Jacksonville, Florida, 125th Fighter Wing. I'm the newly appointed PAO there.

MR. LITTLE: Great.

Q: How would you recommend --

MR. LITTLE: We just had a good time with the secretary down in Jacksonville.

Q: Sir?

MR. LITTLE: We just had a good time with the secretary in Jacksonville.

Q: Oh, yes, sir. Awesome. Thank you, sir.

MR. LITTLE: You bet.

Q: How would you recommend --

MR. LITTLE: Jaguar fan?

Q: Sir?

MR. LITTLE: Jaguar fan?

Q: Somewhat. More of a University of Florida fan.

MR. LITTLE: Okay, all right.

Q: Go Gators.

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MR. LITTLE: I'm sorry to hear that.

Q: (off mic) sir.

MR. LITTLE: My wife grew up in Miami, so -- I went to UVA, so I'm a Virginia football fan. It's been a rough patch for us.

Q: Yes, sir.

MR. LITTLE: But anyway, go ahead with your question.

Q: I commend you for admitting that, sir.

MR. LITTLE: Okay.

Q: Sir, as a young, inspired lieutenant going back to a command, prior enlisted, newly appointed to the PAO position, it's so easy to be amongst fellow PA representatives and get so inspired to how important it is to the success of our mission. How would you recommend going back to a command and re-emphasizing and -- for better words -- convincing our leaders that it is so important to mission success, going back to a fighter wing where, you know, flying those birds is the most important thing on their mind? How would you recommend approaching that?

MR. LITTLE: That's a good question. I think it's about having conversations at whatever opportunity you can, whether it's in the chow hall or in the commissary or as you're walking down the street on the way to your car. That's how we're going to get this message across.

There are some in government -- and in the private sector, for that matter -- who view PA as a quintessential support function and you bring in the PAOs when all else fails. That's problematic. And I think that's the point I was trying to get across today, was that public affairs is mission-central. It's mission-critical. And it's better -- if there's problem especially -- to be involved in the conversations and to have awareness early on and then to get out ahead of it so that we're not just the public affairs ordnance disposal unit at the end of the day.

That's not our job. Our job is to help coach our military and civilian leaders through some tough times when it's a tough story. So I think it's about engaging.

I think some inside the department and elsewhere think that public affairs officers are a branch office of pick your newspaper or wire service. That's not correct. We know our role. We know our job. It's to represent the men and women of this department. And I think you can come up with some tangible examples of where bringing in public affairs early helps and is a strategic player at the table and some examples where public affairs was brought in later, it didn't work out so well. Then I think that can help draw some compare and contrast scenarios that might resonate with senior leaders.

Q: Thank you very much, sir.

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MR. LITTLE: Thank you. One more question?

Q: Hi, good morning, sir. I'm Sergeant Piper.

MR. LITTLE: Good morning.

Q: I work over in Army production.

MR. LITTLE: Great. And where are you from?

Q: Ohio originally.

MR. LITTLE: Okay.

Q: It's been a while since I've been there.

MR. LITTLE: Okay, all right. He's trying to get past the sports questions, I think. And you root for? Pick your team.

Q: Don't really have one, sir.

MR. LITTLE: Okay, all right. Okay.

Q: Not a sports fan.

MR. LITTLE: That's a safe answer.

Q: My question, sir, it revolves around our communication to the internal audience.

MR. LITTLE: Yes.

Q: And I was just kind of curious to find out, what direction do you think we should go as, you know, we interact with base newspapers, blogs, you know, the myriad of ways that we're approaching our internal audience? What do you see for the future?

MR. LITTLE: There will always be a central role for internal communications to play inside the Department of Defense. Your base newsletter or newspaper and all the broadcast means by which we deliver messages to our troops and civilians overseas especially is critical, critical. So there's no doubt that we have to view internal communications as mission-central and mission-critical, as well.

I would note that, in today's day and age, I don't see a whole lot of difference, frankly, because external and internal communications, so we have to be mindful of that fact, because what we say generally gets out. And that's okay. That's fine. But we need to be aware of the fact that

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what we say, quote, unquote, "internally" could have external impact, so that's one thing that I would just leave you with.

But the bottom line is, we have to communicate internally. As I told the secretary of defense recently, one out of every 100 Americans works for you. That's a large number, 3 million people. I joke with him that that's twice the size of the state of Nebraska, or thereabouts, where he's from. It's a big job, and there are so many audiences and stakeholders to engage internally that we have to do that in the right way.

And I think, on our internal communications, I probably need to do a better job of providing guidance on how we address different audiences. I think the services in many respects do this pretty well, but I think it's worth looking at. It's a good question. Thank you.

Q: Thank you, sir.

MR. LITTLE: All right. And go team, whatever that may be for you. All right. All right. Well, thank you all very much for being here. It's been a delight for me. Great questions, as I would expect from a public affairs audience. And with that, I'll wish you a good day, and thanks for all your hard work. Appreciate it. Take care.

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